

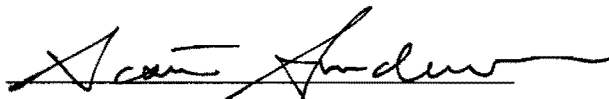
“Reflections”

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Scott Anderson", written over a horizontal line.

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Abstract

This body of work is meant to represent some of the problems in society today, such as the loss of individual identity and sexism. The group of work consists of seven mixed media drawings.

Artist Statement

The work I have done for this show revolves around social issues of human interactivity. Each piece is meant to be a reflection of the way others, women in particular, are judged and treated by society as a whole.

The color red has a long symbolic history representing passion both towards affection and destruction, the same passion that enflames society. Rather than go for a straight blood-red, I went for an earthier feel as a way to ground the images from the very beginning. All drawing was done in black and white as a representation of the harsh nature of subject, and similarly the overall dark feeling the pieces have is to reflect on the dark nature of the subject matter.

Throughout the body of work there are some symbols frequently utilized, such as having the “victim” figures appearing nude to represent how vulnerable humans are. Blacking out the eyes or otherwise hiding the identity of other figures serves to represent the loss of individual identity that occurs when some on tries to be just another member of society. Each piece also has its own symbols, such as the locks in *Glass Ceiling* representing restriction in the business and political worlds and the hands in *Are You Lost?* reflecting how society will try to drag you into itself.

Acknowledgements

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The Idea

When I was trying to decide upon what to do for my senior exhibition, the only things I had really determined were that I wanted my work to convey a message and I also wanted it to reflect on my time here at Ball State. The first real kicking off point for me was looking back at one of my old pieces from an early drawing class. The piece, titled *Welcome to America*, was one of the first assignments where I had total creative control, so for me it was a good way to look back at the things that had inspired me in the past. The idea of addressing socio-political issues like that was really something that had not come to mind before I came to Ball State. Previously I had merely avoiding thinking about the problems, essentially sheltering myself from the rest of the world. However, when I came here many of my Honors courses forced me to confront all of these issues that I had been avoiding, and I discovered I had some rather strong opinions towards many of problems I saw. After reflecting upon that I concluded that I would create a body to emphasis some of the societal issues that I feel particularly strongly about. Some of these issues are gender discrimination, self-isolation, the danger of losing one's identity trying to be accepted, and how shallow views of love have become.

Artistic Reference

During the course of planning and executing my pieces I had several artists whose work I looked to for reference and inspiration. The works of Henry Fuseli are usually dark in their imagery, but still full of life. I wanted to try to capture that same energy and sense of drama within my works. One of the things that struck me while looking through his work was his use of color to heighten the emotive quality of his work. He also used subtle exaggerations and contortions to further create a dramatic tension within his pieces. Dan Addington was a part of the visiting artist series of slide lectures and workshops the art department hosted a couple of

years ago. While I thought all of his work was quite beautiful, one of the things that really stuck with me were the many layers of imagery that all worked in harmony to create a completed piece. Though I knew I could not replicate the same effect as the encaustic work, what I looked at more was the way amount of depth each piece gained from the overlapping layers of imagery. Going into working on my pieces I knew I wanted my images to have a tenebristic quality, or having strongly contrasting lights and darks. For reference I looked toward two masters of the technique. The painter Caravaggio is occasionally referred to as the father of this style of high contrasting light and dark so it was only natural that I look toward him. *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, depicting the story of the Gospel of Matthew, and *The Denial of St. Peter*, representing the story of Peter denying Christ three times, are two examples of his use of tenebrism to enhance the dramatic effect of his paintings. To look at it from a somewhat more graphic standpoint I referenced the etchings of Rembrandt, such as *The Three Crosses* depicting the crucifixion of Jesus.

Media/Technique

When I started planning out my pieces, I wanted to just use basic drawing media because I wanted each piece to be about the idea it was meant to express not to focus on the materials used to create it. I used acrylic paint to create a background wash on each piece, and I used acrylic to both create a smoother surface and ensure that I could not remove it by accident later. I used an earthy red color, reminiscent of dried blood, for the background. The reason I chose to use red is for the strong symbolic nature of the color. Red is a rather contradictory color used to represent love and passion as well as destruction and war; similarly society is a rather contradictory group often with a passion for destruction. All of the actual drawing was done using charcoal, white conte, and ink. These are some of the first materials with which I learned

to draw with. They were also the materials that I felt were the most appropriate for my project. The reason I chose to stick with just black and white for the images with not due to any fear of using color, but rather because I felt that to best express the harsh nature of the subject matter. In order to create depth in within my pieces similar to that which I saw in the works of Dan Addington, I would do multiple layers of drawing on each piece of paper. To do this, after one layer of drawing I would put a coat of spray fixative on it and then do either another layer of drawing or make a translucent layer with ink washes and repeating the process until I was satisfied.

Themes and Symbols

The biggest themes running through my body of work are sexism, identity loss, and the judgments that we as a society cast down upon one another. In particular, the body of work as a whole focuses on issues concerning women. While I can only hope that these are no longer issues in the future, I have tried to ensure that the work I have created will still be relevant then. Throughout the body of work there are several recurring elements to help connect all the pieces with one another. The female nudes utilized throughout my work serve a multi-tiered symbolic purpose. On the one hand, the female nude is a classic idea of beauty that adds a timeless, universal feel to the pieces. The female nude has also been blasted by feminist critique and calls into question the authenticity, relevance and distortion of the dominance of the male gaze in Western Art. Another angle of the female image is as a representation of vulnerability. This comes from the damsel in distress mentality where women are always the ones that need to be rescued because they are able to fend for themselves. Another element I employ frequently is hiding the face of the figures. This serves to represent the loss of personal identity when an

individual becomes just another member of society. In addition to these elements, the individual pieces have their own sets of symbols.

Are You Lost?

This was the first piece that I created and it is about the choice one has of whether they allow themselves to be absorbed by society or maintain their individuality. The female figure in the background is the person that just allows things to happen to them, and the clawed fingers grabbing a hold of her are all of the things that hold us back from being ourselves. In front of the figure, the shadows of the hands of society reach out to envelope her completely. Drawn within all of the hands are figures representing the people that have already lost their identity to society, with their eyes blackened out to show that they are merely shells of themselves. The figure in the front represents the people that are able to maintain their individuality and not get drawn into the horde. The fact that both the victim and the individual are women is significant. In many cultures, women are expected to be seen and not heard, sometimes they are not even to be seen. Even in America, there has been a long tradition where women are suppose to be submissive, a tradition that can still be found here today in some areas. The back figure is a representative of this practice, while the front figure embodies the need for strong women to be not just acceptable but to be normal.

What's Love Got to Do With it?

This piece represents how twisted the portrayal of love has become in society. The idea stemmed from my frustration with things like *Rock of Love* whose commercials show a woman taking off her top and *Millionaire Matchmaker* with its slogan of “money can buy you love, not to mention the new *Farmer Wants a Wife*. It disgusted me how little such a powerful feeling means in today’s society. The background figure, essentially being groped from all sides,

represents how today's society easily interchanges the idea of love for that of lust and then glorifies that idea. The foreground figure is a victim of what happens when the shallow ideas of love portrayed on television are manifested in reality. Bound at the throat and wrists, her bonds form the shape of a heart. I chose to do that, specifically because of how cliché the heart is as a representation of love. The cliché valentine heart form stands in correlation to the way any real or genuine feelings of our society or of the individual become mocked by all of these shallow reality television romance shows. Grounding the ropes that bind the figure is a smeared version of a barcode, a mere label, and a commodity maker. The barcode itself symbolizes the commercialization of feelings, and the smearing and fading imply the corrosion of society.

Conclusion

Each piece in the body of work I have created for my senior exhibition where is meant to be a reflection of a particular social issue, be that sexism or identity loss or isolation and so on. My intention with this exhibition is to have the viewer think about the world a little differently, to notice the flaws within our society. Ideally, the ultimate result of my work would be for change to come about and start to solve the problems I've represented. If that does not happen, I created work that I should withstand the test of time and continue to give notice to these issues for as long as they remain.



